Contribution ID : **71**   Type : **Oral Presentation**

Ego-networks and behaviours of Italian elderly in the COVID-19 pandemic time

martedì 2 maggio 2023 17:30 (15)

Many researchers have studied the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic and the associated containment measures on demography, society, and the economy, focusing on direct and indirect effects. Using data from two waves of the SHARE Corona Survey carried out in 2020 and 2021, i.e., during the first lockdown and then after one year, we aim to depict the social network characteristics of older people in Italy, focusing on tracing the changes related to the outbreak of the SARS-CoV-2 virus. In these surveys, there is a section dedicated to the personal social network, and we used such information to build individual networks of relationships. Thus, it is possible to assess differences that emerged in elderly social space. Four network types are identified: No alters (isolated person), Kin (familiar social space), Non-Kin (neighborhood/friends/colleagues), and Extensive (regularly seeing family members together with people outside the family circle). Results show that in the second wave most of the elderly recovered from the first wave (when people avoided social contacts also due to social restrictions) and changed network configuration, making it more comprehensive. Most transitions are from No-Alters and Non-Kin types towards a higher number of social relationships. Then, we model the network change at the individual level to test if some personal characteristics (socio-demographic) or pandemic-related behaviours/conditions impact the probability of changing network type. Finally, some relevant "non-intended" behaviours emerged, mainly related to reducing activities involving meeting people, except visiting relatives. Furthermore, the elderly in rural areas are more likely to increase the number of their social relationships, as well as people claiming that they have not been depressed in the last period. In contrast, age has a negative impact on such probability.

Keywords

ego-centered networks, older people, Covid-19 pandemic-lockdown, SHARE Corona 1, SHARE Corona 2

Topics

• Egonetworks and applications

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Session Classification : Egonetworks and applications

Track Classification : Egonetworks